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TRACHOMA

ITS NATURE AND PREVENTION

BY

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SUPPLEMENT No. 8
TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS

NOVEMBER 21, 1913
REVISED EDITION: SEPTEMBER, 1915



WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

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TRACHOMA: ITS NATURE AND PREVENTION.

By JOHN McMULLEN, Surgeon, United States Public Health Service.

Trachoma is a very old disease, probably as old as the Bible itself. It is also called by some "granulated lids," "sore eyes," etc., and is communicable or "catching" from one person to another. Those who have it can in most cases be cured, and those who have not yet caught it can avoid doing so if they will learn how to protect themselves against infection. If everyone, men, women, and children, will learn about trachoma and take means for its prevention, the disease will in time disappear.

Trachoma Causes Much Blindness.

A prominent eye specialist of Kentucky says that three-fourths of the people who have granulated lids (trachoma) and do not have them treated, will eventually become blind. Even if blindness does not follow, every case of the disease causes some damage to the eyesight of those afflicted.

Even without treatment, the disease appears to get better, and the eyes feel so much improved that the patient imagines he is cured, but sooner or later it will start up again even worse than before. Each of these attacks leaves its mark on the eyeball and affects the sight. This occasional starting afresh is characteristic of the disease, and is sure to continue for years, or a lifetime, unless the eyelids have been thoroughly treated and the trachoma has been cured.

The sooner trachoma is treated and cured the less will be the injury to the sight. The longer it lasts the more damaged will the eyelids become. On this account, and because the eyelids will turn in and constantly lash the eyeball, pain and irritation continue and the sight will slowly but surely become worse until finally blindness results.

Trachoma is Transmitted from the Sick to the Well.

Trachoma being communicable, or "catching," every person who has it caught it by getting into his eyes the discharges (pus) from the eyes of somebody else suffering with it. It is impossible to get

the disease otherwise. Trachoma infection, then, must be planted in the eye in order that it may grow, exactly as corn and potatoes are planted to have them grow.

The disease, of course, is not "catching" in the same way as are measles or mumps, but it is always due to some of the pus (matter) from a "sore eye" getting into a healthy eye. This can occur in many ways, such as the use of common basins, handkerchiefs, bed-clothes, or towels. The use of the same towel by more than one person is the easiest way to convey the infection, and, undoubtedly, more cases of "granulated eyelids" among the mountain people are caused by the common family towel than by any other source of infection.

Children at school may also convey the disease to others by exchanging or using the same pencils, slates, and cloths, or in playing games by blindfolding with cloths, fingers, etc. As the disease feels like a cinder in the eye, a friend may try to remove it and neglect to wash his hands before rubbing his own eyes. In fact, the disease can be contracted in any manner which serves as a means of conveying infected discharges from a diseased to a healthy eye.

Some of our very reliable and observing people of the mountains have stated that they can remember when a case of "sore eyes" was quite rare, while at present cases are very common. This means that this dangerous communicable disease is spreading.

Early Symptoms of Trachoma.

When trachoma begins the eyes feel as though a cinder, corn silk, sand, dirt, sawdust, or other substance had gotten into them, and usually some of these things are blamed for the eyes getting sore. The eyes soon become red and painful and discharge water. Some pus (matter) is present, and the eyelashes stick together in the mornings. Soon the light affects the eyes and in time causes so much pain that it is necessary to wear dark glasses or to tie a dark cloth over the head in the effort to keep out the light.

The inner surface of the eyelids becomes rough, somewhat like sandpaper, and irritates the eyeball during every wink of the eye, often described as "cutting."

It is this constant irritation that causes the eyeball to become red and painful. Ulcers appear, and a new growth is formed over the pupil, and then the patient is liable slowly to become blind. While the redness, pain, and discharges may cease for a time, the disease is almost sure to return unless treated, each attack damaging the eye more and more. Early treatment of trachoma thus becomes necessary, and it should be continued until the disease is cured.

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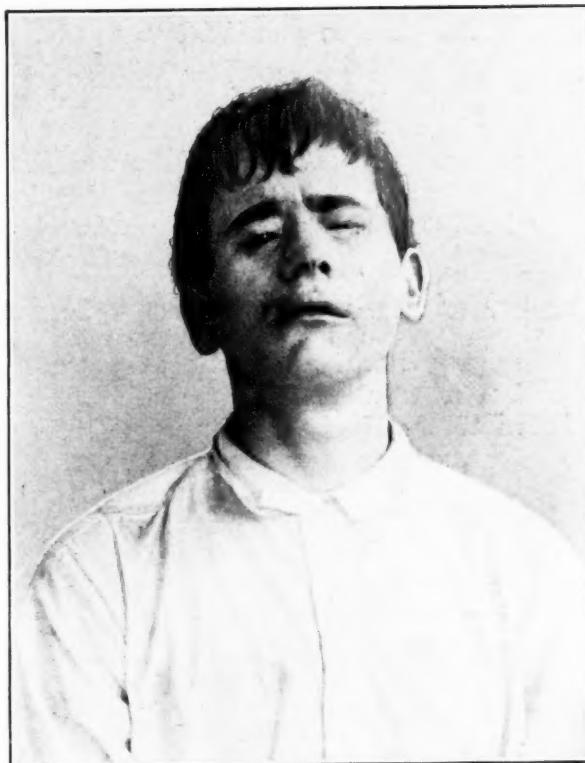


FIG. 1.—BLIND AS THE RESULT OF TRACHOMA.



FIG. 2.—SHOWING THE MUTILATING EFFECTS OF TRACHOMA AFTER YEARS' STANDING.



FIG. 3.—THE COMMON TOWEL, BASIN, AND SOAP ARE THE CHIEF MEANS OF SPREADING TRACHOMA.

Early and Continued Treatment Necessary.

Many years ago the General Government realized the dangerous communicable nature of trachoma, and it will not allow any foreigner who has the disease to land in our country. Since it has been found that a great many cases of the disease are present among our own people the Government has determined to extend treatment to those in the mountains suffering with it, in order that they may be cured and the spread of the disease prevented. Persons who have the disease should observe the following rules:

Advice to Those Having Trachoma.

1. Apply at once for treatment to the nearest hospital, dispensary, or to your physician.
2. Follow the directions of the doctors and nurses as to treatment and prevention.
3. Do not stop treatment until you are cured.
4. Wash the face and hands several times a day and keep the finger nails clean.
5. Have your own washbasin, soap, and towel.
6. Boil your handkerchiefs before adding them to the wash.
7. Do not allow your clothing or bedclothes to become soiled with the discharges (pus) from your eyes.
8. When your eyes are discharging pus collect the discharges on cloths which can be burned and stay away from members of your family as much as possible.
9. Sleep alone and with the window open.
10. Keep your home clean and have large windows to let in fresh air and sunshine.

How to Avoid Contracting Trachoma.

It is the duty of every man, woman, and child to do all he or she can to prevent the spread of trachoma. Every case of the disease could have been prevented. Every case occurring in a child is the fault of somebody. The following are some of the things that people should do to avoid infection:

1. Keep in good physical condition.
2. Have large windows in your home, which will admit plenty of fresh air and sunshine.
3. Sleep with windows open even in winter, and keep the room well aired where you live and study.
4. Do not use the common family towel, especially in homes where there are cases of trachoma.

5. Have a towel and handkerchief of your own, and don't let anybody else use them.
6. Always make sure that the washbasin is clean before you use it.
7. Do not sleep with persons who have "sore eyes" nor use bed-clothes that have been used by them.
8. Do not wear the clothing of persons who have "sore eyes" nor use their eating utensils without previous cleansing.
9. Boil the handkerchiefs, etc., of persons having sore eyes, and do not touch their faces.
10. Advise persons with sore eyes to have them treated at one of the eye dispensaries.

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